

January 21, 2007 - Norwich Diocese settles priest abuse lawsuit for \$2 million. Newsday (NY)

NORWICH, Conn. (AP) _ The Diocese of Norwich has settled a priest abuse lawsuit for \$2 million, the Norwich Bulletin reported Sunday.

Michael Nelligan, 44, accused the Rev. Bruno Primavera, a visiting priest in the diocese from 1978 to 1980, of molesting him while Primavera served at St. Mark's Church in Westbrook.

Nelligan, an altar boy, was 15 at the time.

Primavera also served at St. Mary Star of the Sea Church in New London.

"Michael has struggled with this ordeal all his life," said Robert Reardon, Nelligan's New London lawyer. He said Nelligan decided to step forward when he saw others do so.

A message seeking comment was left with Nelligan at his Portland, Maine, home.

Joseph T. Sweeney, a lawyer who represented the diocese, said local church officials hope Nelligan can use the money to get help for his mental anguish.

Bishop Michael Cote is "very concerned about this issue," Sweeney said. "Our hearts go out to Michael Nelligan."

Reardon said the large settlement was the result of evidence of Primavera's sexual misconduct in the 1970s that was overlooked.

Canada's Diocese of Toronto sent a letter to Norwich in 1978 when Primavera arrived in Norwich, saying Primavera had "a tendency to seek out the companionship of young teenage boys on a one-to-one basis," Reardon said.

Toronto church officials said there had been no scandal, but Primavera received counseling from a Catholic psychiatrist and that it was advisable to send him elsewhere.

"The conduct here was quite disturbing," Reardon said. "The diocese accepted this priest from the Diocese of Toronto knowing he had been overtly friendly with young boys."

Sweeney said Norwich Diocese officials were told by the Toronto Diocese in 1978 that Primavera's actions were not sexual in nature. "The diocese back in 1978 did act responsibly," he said.

Parishioners in Westbrook lodged complaints about "theft and homosexuality" related to Primavera in 1979 and he was transferred to New London.

Michael Long of Waterford accused Primavera of molestation while in New London in 1978. The diocese settled for \$1.1 million last year.

Waterford police found Primavera "in a compromising position" with a boy in 1980, Sweeney said. Primavera was fired and sent back to Toronto, he said.

Primavera served in dioceses in Toronto, Boston, Hartford and New York before going to New Mexico in 1990 to teach at a Catholic boys' high school. He was convicted of sex offenses involving teenage boys.

He was defrocked as a priest and died in Connecticut last year denying any wrongdoing.